

Honorable Judge Thomas P. Boyd
Honorable Judge Donald L. Allen, Jr.



Court Administrator Michael J. Dillon
Magistrate Mark E. Blumer

State of Michigan
55th Judicial District Court
700 Buhl Avenue • Mason, Michigan 48854
517-676-8400 • <http://dc.ingham.org>

December 3, 2018

Hon. Jim Runestad, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, Michigan 48909

RE: House Bill 6344

Dear Chairman Runestad:

We support the passage of House Bill 6344. The bill allows the Cities of Lansing and East Lansing to enter into negotiations and reach agreement with the County of Ingham on consolidation of our district courts. Consolidation of district courts would allow Ingham County courts to continue providing high quality justice and programs at a reduced cost. It is the responsibility of all elected officials to be stewards of public funds. We take this responsibility seriously and pursue consolidation because we believe it will result in better service at a lower price.

Consolidation of 3rd class courts into a county-funded court of the first class is not new. Half of the counties which originally maintained 3rd class courts have consolidated them into their county courts. House Bill 6344 is patterned after previous consolidations.

The only aspect of the bill which is novel is the creation of three distinct jury pools. Michigan's district courts are a legislative creation. The authority and jurisdiction of the district courts is within the control of the legislature. House Bill 6344 as introduced allows Ingham County to create a single administrative unit to maximize efficiency while preserving these jury pools.

At last week's committee hearing, Representative Robinson asked about diversity in the judges serving Ingham County residents after consolidation. There are currently eight district judges, seven circuit judges and two probate judges serving in Ingham County. As of January 1, 2019, these included nine women and seven men. Five of these individuals are African-American. There is currently one vacancy at the circuit court awaiting appointment by Governor Snyder.

This diverse group of judges is not dependent upon the election jurisdiction. In fact, the evidence suggests the contrary. The City of Lansing has elected an African-American judge for an open seat this year for the first time since 1982. African-American candidates have lost to white candidates multiple times in the years between these two elections. Conversely, Judge

Clinton Canady, an African-American, defeated white candidates at a countywide ballot in 2010. Judge Donald Allen, an African-American, successfully ran as an incumbent against white

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candidates in the current 55th District Court that same year – where race was an issue in the campaign. The 55th District Court's jurisdiction is less than 5% African-American.

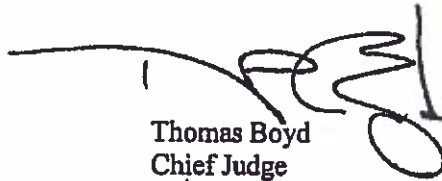
We urge the legislature to allow the people of Ingham County to determine the best organizational structure for their district court. House Bill 6344 empowers the elected representatives of the residents of Lansing, East Lansing and Ingham County to craft an agreement of consolidation that works for them. If they fail to reach agreement within the next year, the internal sunset provision of HB 6344 retains the status quo.

Please do not hesitate to contact either of us if you have questions or concerns about our support for HB 6344 or District Court consolidation in Ingham County.

Sincerely,



Louise Alderson
Chief Judge
54A District Court
517-483-4421



Thomas Boyd
Chief Judge
55th District Court
517-676-8414